

VZCZCXRO8966
OO RUEHCHI RUEHCN RUEHDT RUEHHM
DE RUEHML #0718/01 0791003
ZNR UUUUU ZZH
O 191003Z MAR 08
FM AMEMBASSY MANILA
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 0208
INFO RUEHZS/ASSOCIATION OF SOUTHEAST ASIAN NATIONS IMMEDIATE
RUEHGP/AMEMBASSY SINGAPORE IMMEDIATE 7356
RUENAAA/SECNAV WASHINGTON DC IMMEDIATE
RHHMUNA/CDRUSPACOM HONOLULU HI IMMEDIATE
RHHMHAH/USCINCPACFLT PEARL HARBOR HI IMMEDIATE

UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 02 MANILA 000718

SIPDIS

SENSITIVE
SIPDIS

STATE FOR EAP

E.O. 12958: N/A
TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [RP](#)
SUBJECT: RESTRICTIONS ON U.S.-PHILIPPINE HYDROGRAPHIC
SURVEYS HAMPER EFFECTIVENESS

REF: MANILA 0141

11. (SBU) SUMMARY: Since its inception in 2003, the U.S.-Philippine Hydrographic Cooperation Program has proven both strategically and commercially valuable to U.S. and Philippine interests. Using advanced sonar technology to map shipping lanes, harbors, and ports throughout the Philippines, an archipelago of more than 7,000 islands, this program is crucial to facilitating port visits of U.S. Navy vessels and supports civil military operations throughout the country by the U.S. and the Armed Forces of the Philippines. At the same time, for a U.S. investment of \$30 million, the surveys will yield an estimated \$300 million in maritime commerce benefits to the Philippines, making it an important U.S. economic development tool for the Philippines. The survey program was quickly altered earlier this year after a incident involving a Philippine maritime police patrol boat firing warning shots at a U.S. survey vessel in late January.

As part of an intensive effort to avoid similar incidents, the Mission has actively assisted the Philippines in developing and implementing a comprehensive notification process at the national, provincial, and local levels to facilitate communications among Philippine security agencies and ensure no further misunderstandings. Since the January incident, 7th Fleet instituted new guidelines restricting U.S. vessels to no less than four nautical miles from the Philippine coast when conducting survey operations. These new restrictions severely hamper the original intent of this survey program, prohibiting it from surveying critical coastal areas that are essential to port calls made by U.S. vessels and mapping waterways with strategic commercial value. Mission recommends that this joint program be restored to its original operational guidelines as soon as possible. END SUMMARY.

MUTUAL BENEFITS

12. (U) Since its inception in 2003, the U.S.-Philippine Hydrographic Cooperation Program has played a vital role in U.S. - Philippine military cooperation. This program uses advanced sonar technology to map shipping lanes, harbors, and ports throughout the Philippines, an archipelago of more than 7,000 islands. The Philippine-U.S. Hydrographic Cooperation Program became a more formal program after being signed as part of the Mutual Defense Board in 2006 by U.S. Naval Meteorology and Oceanographic Office and the Philippine National Mapping and Resource Information Authority. Since 2003, the USG has invested \$30 million in this joint program. In the last two years, vessels have collected data in most of the Philippines territorial waters north of Luzon and the

San Bernardino and Mindoro Straits. Earlier this year, surveys began in the Verde Island Strait and Calavite Passage. Future survey operations include the Balabac and Surigao Straits, the Sibutu Passage, and the Sulu Sea.

13. (U) Benefits derived from these joint survey operations to both the U.S. and the Philippines are significant. These joint surveys afford the Philippines the ability to update nautical charts that, in some cases, use data more than 80 years old. Such dated information can lead to faulty channel readings and inaccurate island locations, imperiling navigation. New charts, surveyed to modern standards, provide U.S. ships with the information necessary to ensure safe navigation in Philippine waters and to facilitate U.S. Navy port calls in remote locations (reftel), many of which are in areas where U.S. presence is welcome, but not common. The charts are shared with the Philippine authorities and commercial shippers, which leads to lower port and shipping costs. The prominent International Hydrographic Organization estimates that each dollar spent on nautical surveys produces a tenfold return on investment through increased maritime activities. Under that estimate, the surveys conducted to date should yield over \$300 million in maritime commerce benefits to the Philippines.

SURVEY TEAM SECURITY A PRIORITY

14. (U) On January 25, a small, unmarked vessel from the hydrographic survey team had shots fired in its direction by a local Philippine maritime police patrol boat while conducting a survey off the coast of Mindoro Oriental Province in central Philippines. While no one was injured during this incident, the 7th Fleet issued new operational

MANILA 00000718 002 OF 002

guidelines for survey vessels that altered the program from its original mandate, which aimed to provide a comprehensive navigational assessment of Philippine waters. The new guidelines, implemented in an effort to ensure the safety of U.S. personnel, severely limited the utility of the survey program by prohibiting vessels from conducting surveys closer than four nautical miles from the Philippine shoreline.

15. (U) The Philippines has been proactive in investigating the January incident, and with the Mission's assistance, has implemented multiple measures to minimize the chances of a similar incident by promoting better communication within the Philippine government and among its various law enforcement organizations. Post believes the current restrictions on the survey program, if not rescinded, could adversely affect U.S. strategic interests by hindering the U.S. Navy's ability to conduct accurate surveys of less-traveled channels, possibly decreasing the number of ports which could be visited by U.S. Navy vessels this year. At the same time, the restriction to conducting surveys in deeper waters inhibits the collection of data needed to create more precise navigational information about vital Philippine sea lanes integral to Philippine and international commerce.

COMMENT

16. (U) Post firmly supports all measures aimed at guaranteeing the safety of U.S. military and civilian personnel, an issue the Ambassador regularly raises with Philippine interlocutors. At all levels, the Mission is working closely with Philippine agencies to ensure that the proper procedures are in place to provide a secure environment in which various assistance activities, including the U.S.-Philippine Hydrographic Cooperation Program, can be conducted. Post recommends that the survey program be continued and restored to its original operational guidelines in the near future.

KENNEY